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Officials to make Great Places pitch to state

By **EMILY A. ROUSH**
Record-Herald Staff Writer

Warren County officials will next week tell the state's department of cultural affairs exactly what makes this county a great place.

A citizen advisory board for

Iowa Great Places, a new initiative through the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs created by Gov. Tom Vilsack, will next week consider whether Warren County should be one of three in the pilot program.

The program is designed as an economic development tool says Iowa Great Places coordinator Cyndi Pederson. Those named to the program will receive the state's assistance in getting money or finding grants to help fund their projects. The program also bolsters the state's Vision Iowa and Iowa Values Fund.

Warren County is one of 145 places throughout Iowa vying to be named a great place for the first year of the program.

Great Places could include a county, such as Warren County, a city, a region, a district or village, a building, a college or a recreational area — any place that could be considered a great place in Iowa.

"They will help you find the resources to promote your great place," said Indianola Mayor Jerry Kelley who is on the steering committee for Warren County's great places presentation.

"We've found they are appreciative that the government cares about what's happening in their little corner of the world," said Pederson of the places vying to be named in the program.

When a number of Warren County locations applied to be considered a great place, the representatives decided to combine their efforts and apply to the program as a county.

The places in the county, which will be represented in the presentation include the Des Moines Metro Opera, Carlisle's Scotch Ridge Center, the National Balloon Classic,

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Great Place program could mean millions of dollars for projects in Warren County

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Norwalk's multi-use trails, Simpson College, the Warren County Fair and the Warren County Horse Trails Association.

"We are a great place in the Des Moines metro area without being in the Des Moines area," said Kelley.

In addition to the places being represented, the presentation will include information about the rest of the wonderful aspects of Warren County, such as the two state parks Lake Ahquabi and Banner Lakes at Summerset State Park, city parks, the county's wineries, the balloon museum, libraries, garden clubs, cultural events, historic locations, trails and recreational programs.

So what makes a place great?

Iowa Great Places says to be considered a great place, the place must have a unique sense of place, have engaging experiences, a rich, diverse social fabric, a vital, creative economy, a

pleasing environment, a strong foundation and creative culture.

A great place should value its historical roots while involving both natives and newcomers. It should also encourage social interaction, have a growing mix of rewarding jobs and sustaining capital, offer clean, healthy and accessible natural and built environments and contain an accessible infrastructure.

In Warren County, there are more than \$6.8 million in projects in the works. More than \$2.6 million has already been obtained, so if the county is selected as a great place, the projects will have a better chance of receiving the little more than \$4 million to finish the projects.

The presentation to be offered to the citizen advisory board, or judges, will include a video presentation with pictures and synopsis of all the great places within the county. It will also outline how the county has grown and how the

Iowa Great Places program will help the county. Representatives from most of the Warren County places will be present to answer questions.

Whether or not the county is recognized, Kelley said it has been a great experience and has brought all county entities together for a common cause.

Pederson says that's the feeling throughout the state.

"The nice thing that has happened is that, of the places who have applied, it has invited their communities to come together," said Pederson. "It has created stronger communities."

If the pilot program is a success and receives funding from the Iowa Legislature next year, more places will be named great places in the future. If Warren County is not selected, it can apply again next year. If it is selected for the program, it will be announced in early October.

For more information about Iowa Great Places, visit

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